

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

One reason the ACEC is still relatively pristine is because a large percentage of coastal wetlands and surrounding uplands is protected as conservation land and wildlife sanctuaries. According to MassGIS figures, over 10,000 of the 25,500 ACEC acres are owned by federal, state, municipal, and nonprofit organizations for open space protection. The largest land holdings are federal and nonprofit which total over 8,000 acres. The federal Parker River National Wildlife Refuge (4,662 acres) contains most of the lands immediately surrounding Plum Island Sound. Several state wildlife management areas and lands owned by nonprofit groups also protect valuable open space (Figure 19). While most publicly owned open space and land trust properties are open to the public for passive recreation, other open space is protected through Conservation Restrictions and Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (Figure 19).

The larger protected portions of land with public access in the ACEC include (USFWS 1992) (Figure 20):

- ◆ The Parker River National Wildlife Refuge is owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The refuge encompasses 4,662 acres of sandy beach and dunes, bogs, fresh water impoundments, and tidal marshes on Plum Island. The refuge is one of the few natural barrier beach/dune and salt marsh complexes left in the Northeast and is home to more than 800 species of plants and animals. The refuge is known for its wide variety of bird species, and is one of the top bird watching sites in the United States. The refuge has a trail system designed for nature photography and observation, along with an observation tower, visitor station, and beach access boardwalks.
- ◆ Sandy Point State Reservation is owned by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management and consists of approximately 80 acres at the southern tip of Plum Island that can be used for hiking, fishing, and boating.
- ◆ Crane Beach is owned by The Trustees of Reservations and is approximately 1,400 acres in size. The reservation's barrier beach stretches for more than four miles along Ipswich Bay. The reservation also includes shrub thickets, salt marsh, forests, and a drumlin known as Castle Hill where the Great House is located and open for public events. Beach and dune habitat is home for many wildlife species, including the endangered piping plover and least tern.
- ◆ In addition to these three locations, Massachusetts Division of Fish and Wildlife and Essex County Greenbelt Association own land with public access. All access sites where residents and visitors can go to recreate in the ACEC are illustrated in Figure 20 (CZM 2000).

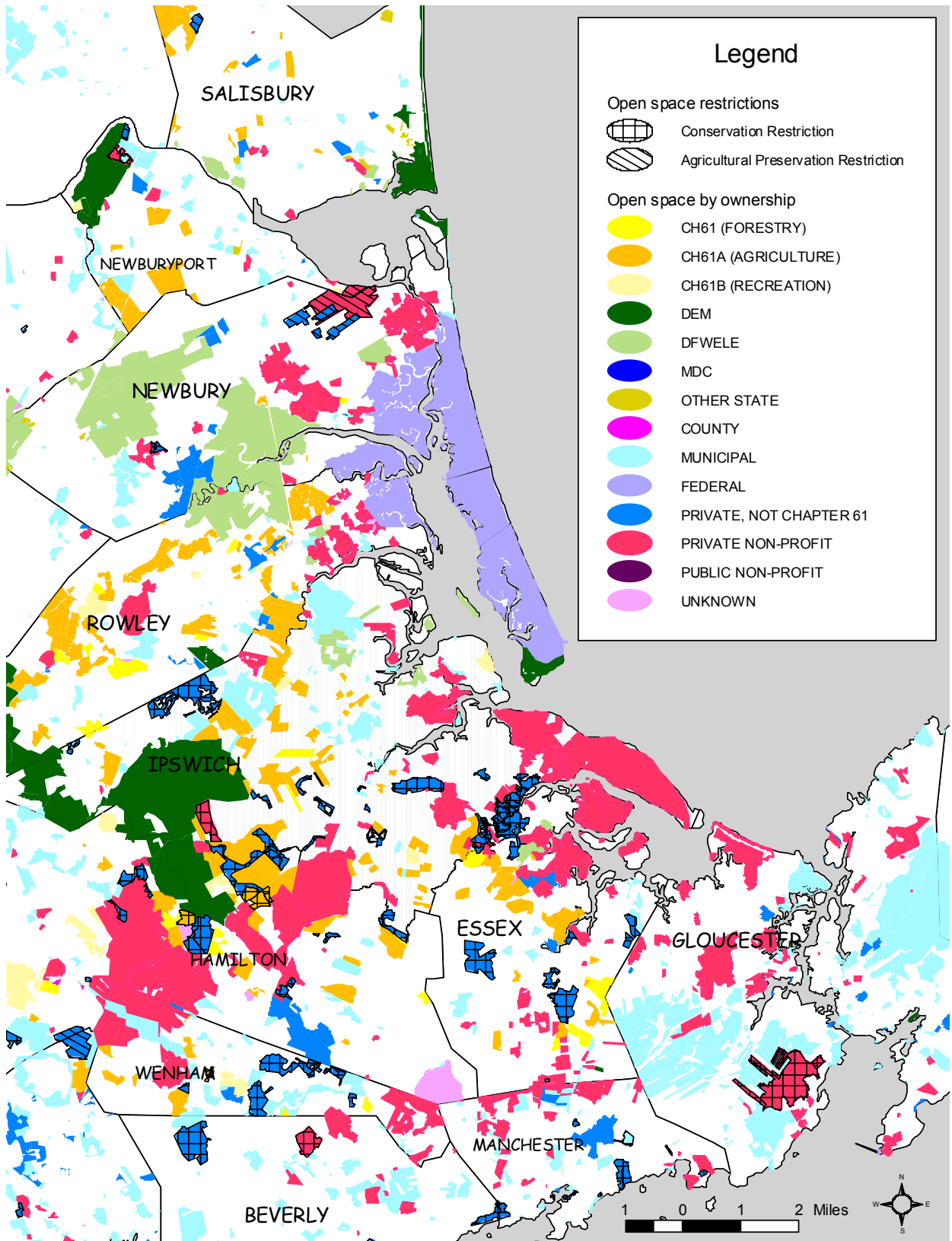


Figure 19. Open space ownership and restrictions

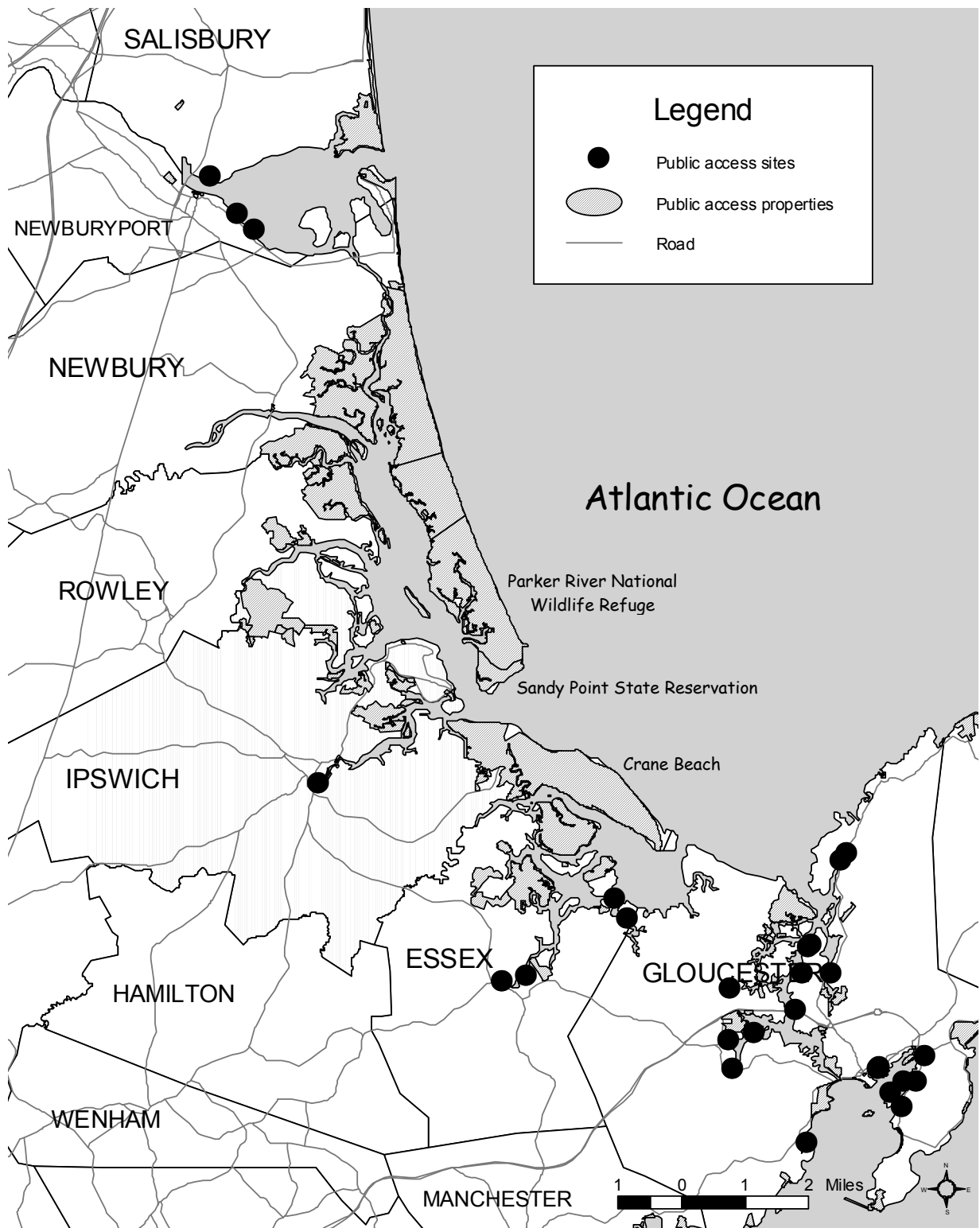


Figure 20. Public access sites and properties

Educational and recreational use of ACEC resources include hiking, nature study, wildlife photography and observation, swimming, boating, fishing, hunting, and clamming. Shorebirds and waterfowl continue to attract birdwatchers to Plum Island Sound and the surrounding USFWS Parker River Wildlife Refuge during spring and fall migrations. Naturalists from the Massachusetts Audubon Society and the Parker River Wildlife Refuge lead regular bird watches in the area. Since the 1990s, other forms of ecotourism have increased throughout the ACEC as boating, kayaking, and walking tours become more popular. Private tour groups lead excursions and public trips to explore the protected estuaries, inland islands, wildlife habitats, beaches, and dunes while teaching some of the area's history.

Recreational boating is also increasing as powerboats, jetskis, fishing vessels, sailboats, kayaks, and canoes become more popular. Much of Plum Island Sound and Essex Bay have designated mooring areas (Figure 21 and 22). Although boats allow people to explore more remote areas and enjoy the ACEC waters, increased boating and the associated marinas, private docks, and mooring fields have been shown to alter nearshore habitats and create water quality problems. Leaking petroleum products, toxic metals, human waste, resuspended sediments, shoreline erosion, and disturbance of wildlife and sensitive habitats are all direct or indirect consequences of boating practices (Buchsbaum 2000). Massachusetts boating regulations require that boats operate at no more than headway speed when within 150 feet of a marina, boat launch or float, within 150 of a swimming area, or within a marked channel unless otherwise posted (Massachusetts Environmental Police 1999). Often defined as "no wake zones", these areas are illustrated in Figure 21 and 22 (*NOTE: 150 feet from **all** shoreline is mapped as the no wake zone in these figures. However, the 150 foot regulations only apply in the areas described above*). In addition to state designated no wake zones, local harbor masters designate additional areas that they enforce (Figure 21, 22).

In Spring, 2000 CZM began addressing boat waste concerns by facilitating the creation of a regional boat waste management plan and outreach tools to promote the use of boat pump-out facilities that dramatically reduce sewage levels found in coastal waters. Both shore-side facilities and pumpout boats are available at various locations in Plum Island Sound (Figure 21). Although no facilities are located directly in Essex Bay, the pumpout boat from Ipswich travels to cover requests from this area; no coverage is available for the Essex River at this time.

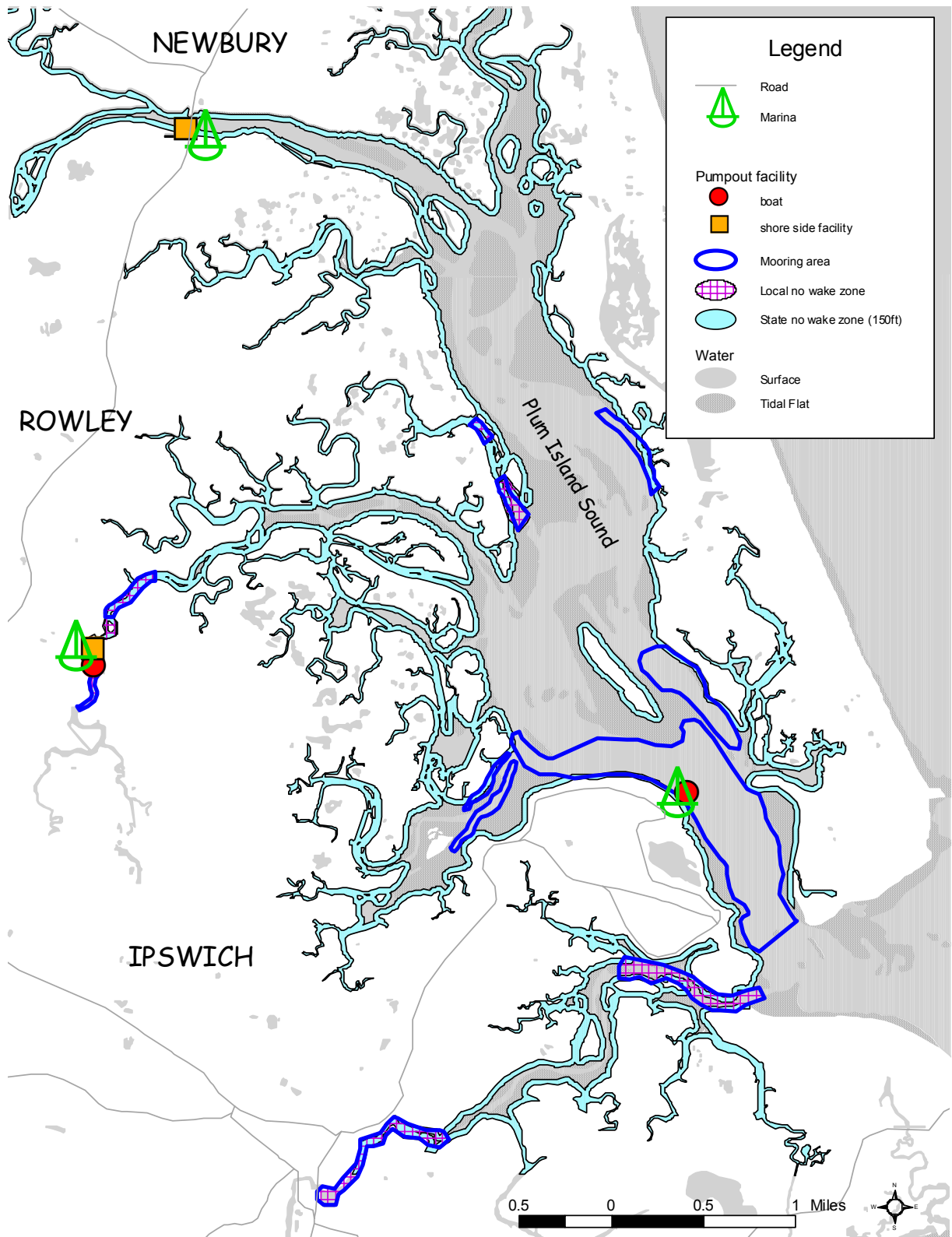


Figure 21. Plum Island Sound boating information

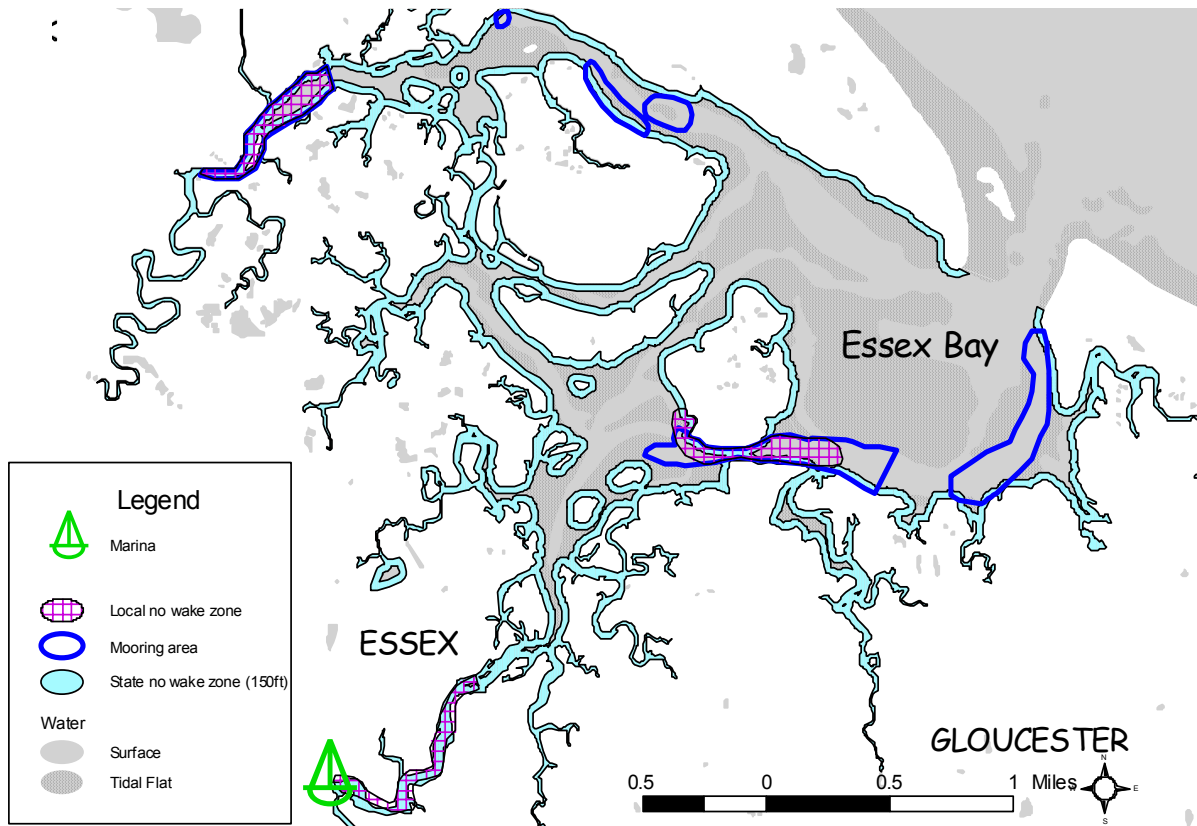


Figure 22. Essex Bay boating information